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TM

THE HANDS OF SHANG-CHI, MASTER OF KUNG FU



ZECK / DAY

"Call me Shang-Chi, as my *father* did, when he raised me in the vacuum of his Honan, China retreat. Since then, I have learned that my father is Dr. Fu Manchu, the most insidiously evil man on earth...and that to *honor* him would bring nothing but *dishonor* to the spirit of my *name*."

Stan Lee
PRESENTS: **MASTER OF KUNG FU!**®

Featuring supporting characters created by SAX ROHMER

THE PRIDE of LEOPARDS

BY
DOUG MOENCH & MIKE ZECK
WRITER PENCILER



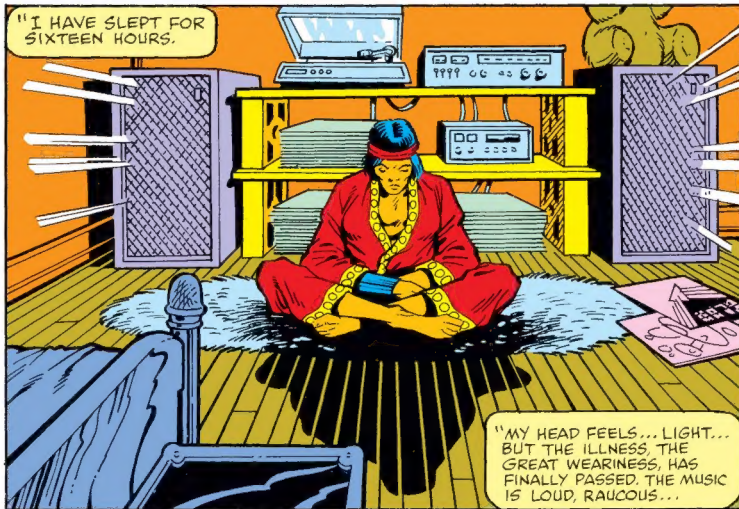
GENE DAY
INKER

JOE ROSEN
LETTERER

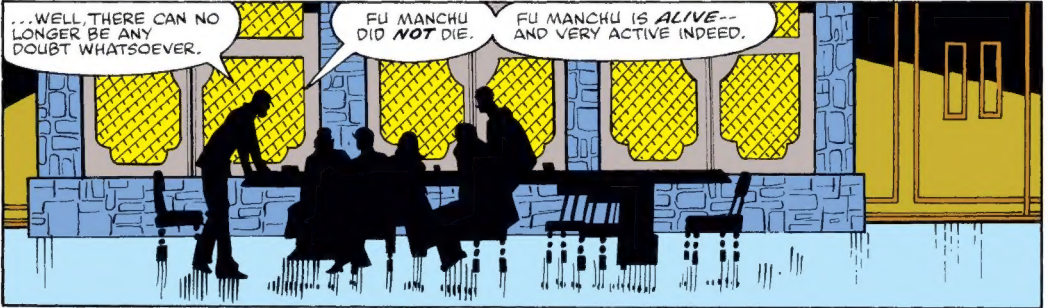
NELSON YOMTOV
COLORIST

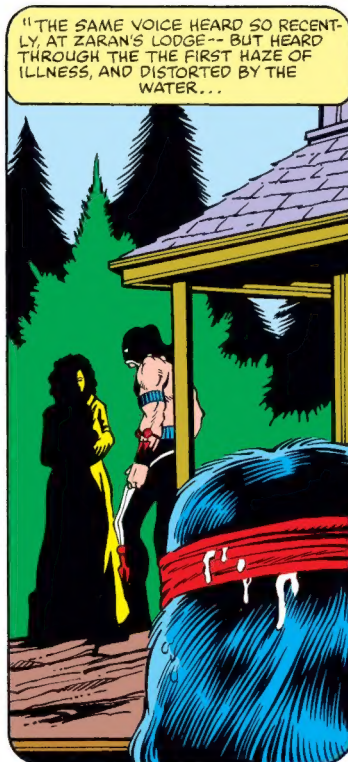
ROGER STERN
EDITOR

JIM SHOOTER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF









Y'MEAN FAH LO SUEE MIGHT BE IN LEAGUE WITH MI-6, SIR DENIS? LORD! BUT THEN, WHY WOULD HER NEW MAN ZARAN KILL A HARD-CORE MI-SIXER LIKE SARSFIELD?

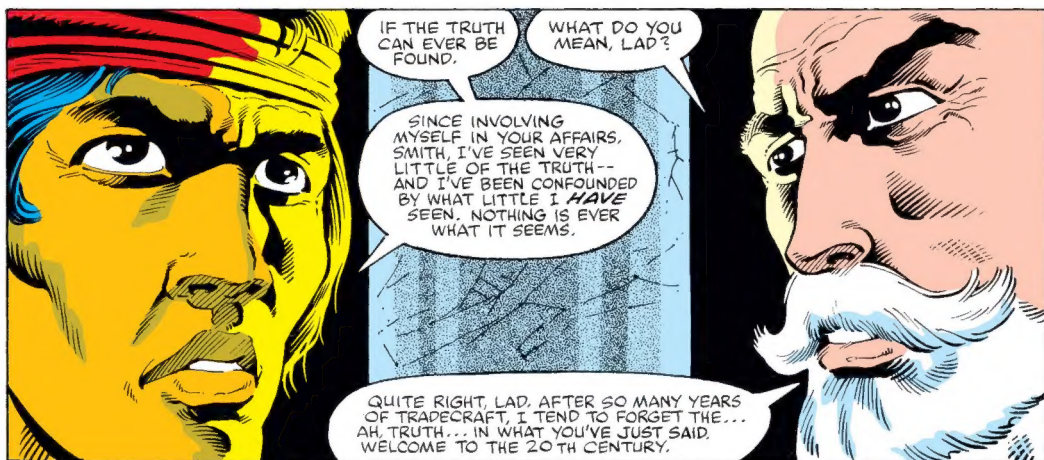
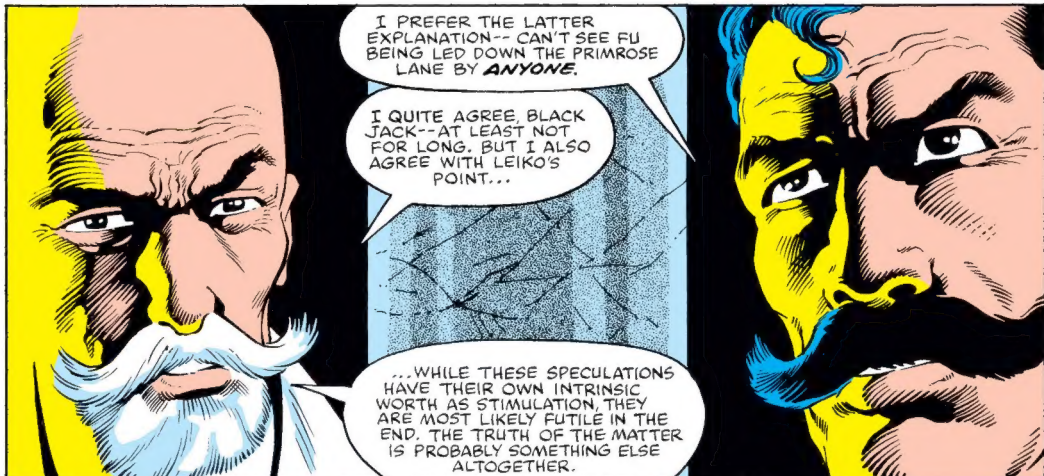
MAYBE SHE'S ALREADY TURNED ON MI-6, TARR, NOW THAT SHE'S FREE--OR MAYBE SARSFIELD WAS A RENEGADE WITHIN MI-6 AND THE REAL LEADERS WANTED HIM DEAD--OR MAYBE HE WAS A MOLE, A SLEEPER FROM SOME OTHER AGENCY AND NEVER REPRESENTED MI-6 IN THE FIRST PLACE.

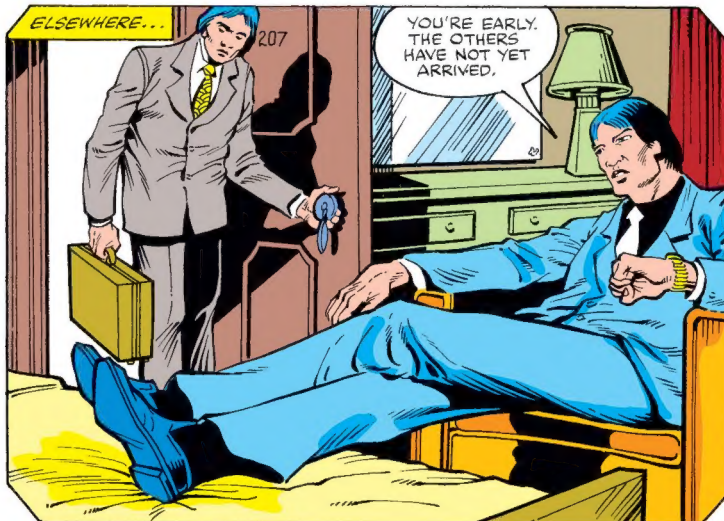
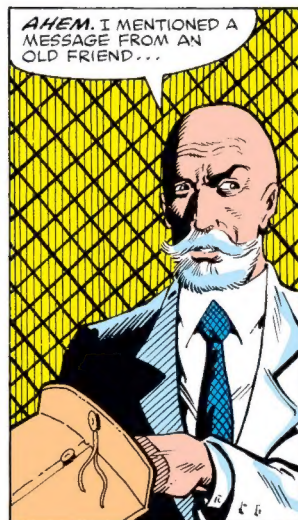
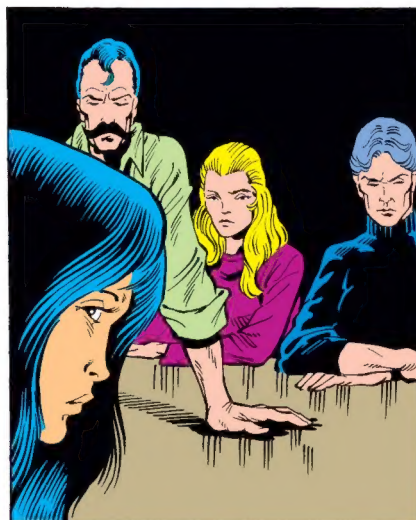
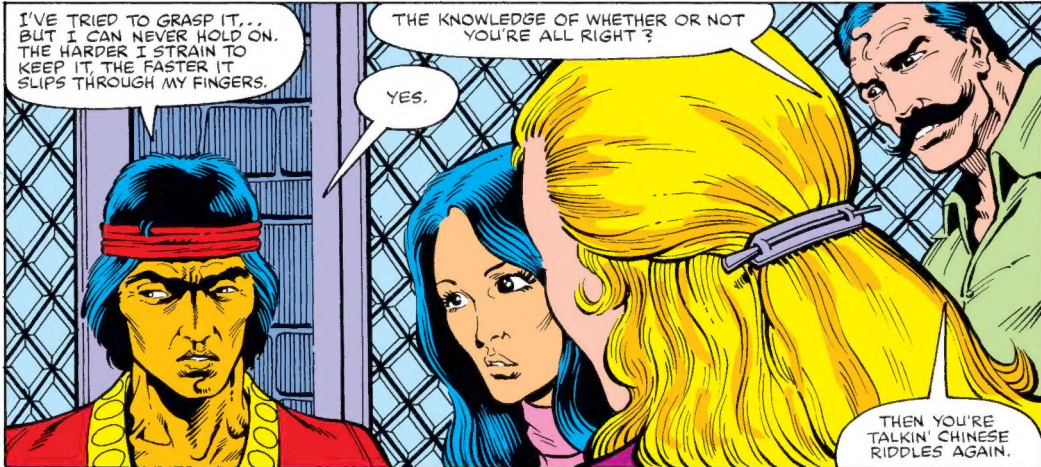
THE FACT REMAINS, CLIVE, THAT PURSUING THIS LINE OF LOGIC IS MADNESS, IT COULD ULTIMATELY LEAD TO THE "INDICATION" THAT MI-6 AND FU MANCHU ARE NOW PARTNERS.

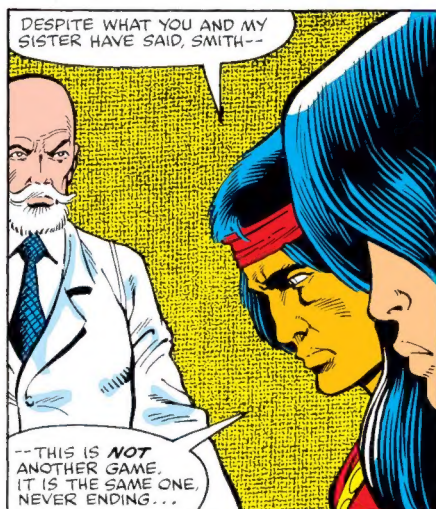
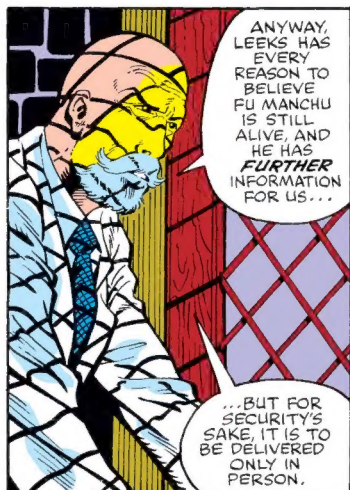
STRANGE BEDFELLOWS, WOT?

MAYBE IT'S NOT MADNESS AT ALL, LEIKO, IF THEY DON'T KNOW THEY'RE PARTNERS-- IF THEY'RE BOTH BEING LED DOWN THE GARDEN PATH BY A THIRD PRINCIPAL, A HIDDEN MANIPULATOR...

OR IF SARSFIELD DID REPRESENT MI-6'S TRUE COLORS, MAKING FU PARTNERS WITH A DIFFERENT FACTION WITHIN MI-6, ANOTHER RENEGADE FACTION, OR A GROUP COMPOSED ENTIRELY OF SLEEPERS WHOVE FINALLY COME AWAKE FOR ACTION.







BUT IF THIS PHASE OF THE GAME ADDS MY SISTER AS A PLAYER-- AND, ESPECIALLY, MY **FATHER**...

"I PAUSE, RECALLING THE VERY LAST TIME MY FATHER SPOKE TO ME..."



YOU THINK I AM MAD, SHANG-CHI. MY PLAN TO RETURN FROM THE HEAVENS AND RULE A NEW WORLD OF MY CREATION SUGGESTS A FIXATION WITH GODHOOD...



...BUT A DERANGED GODHOOD--

-- WHICH SEEKS TO ACHIEVE CREATION THROUGH DESTRUCTION. PERHAPS I **AM** MAD. MY LIFE HAS BEEN SUSTAINED THROUGH MORE YEARS THAN HAVE BEEN WORTH LIVING-- AND TO ONE WHO IS IMMORTAL, WHAT IS LEFT, BESIDES GODHOOD?



"MY ANSWER IS CLEAR..."

YES, SMITH... I AM STILL WITH YOU.



GOOD, LAD-- **GOOD!**

AND YOU KNOW WHERE TO AWAIT ME?

IN DARKNESS, AND IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

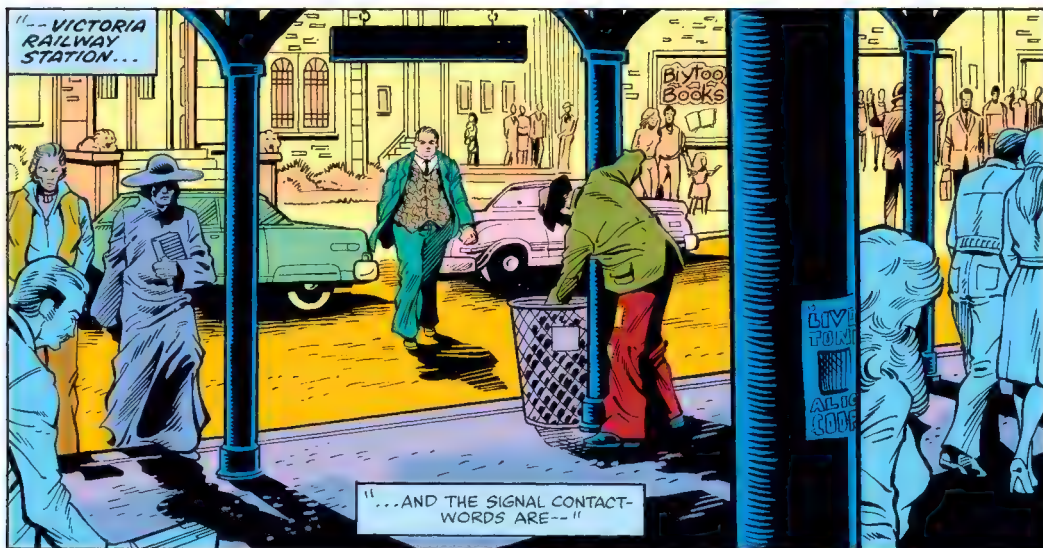
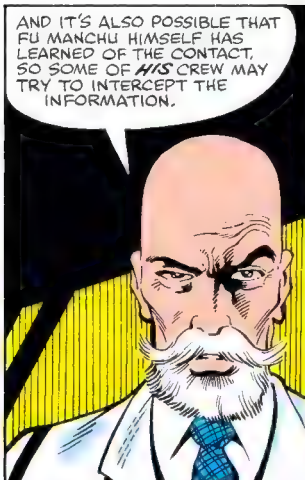


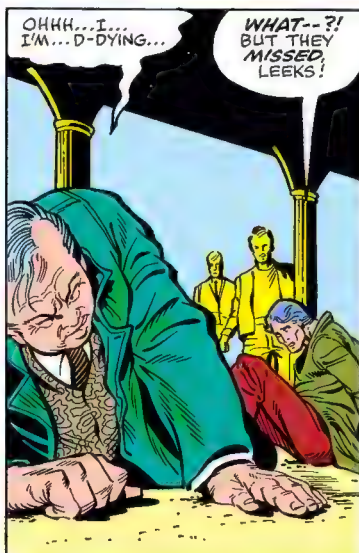
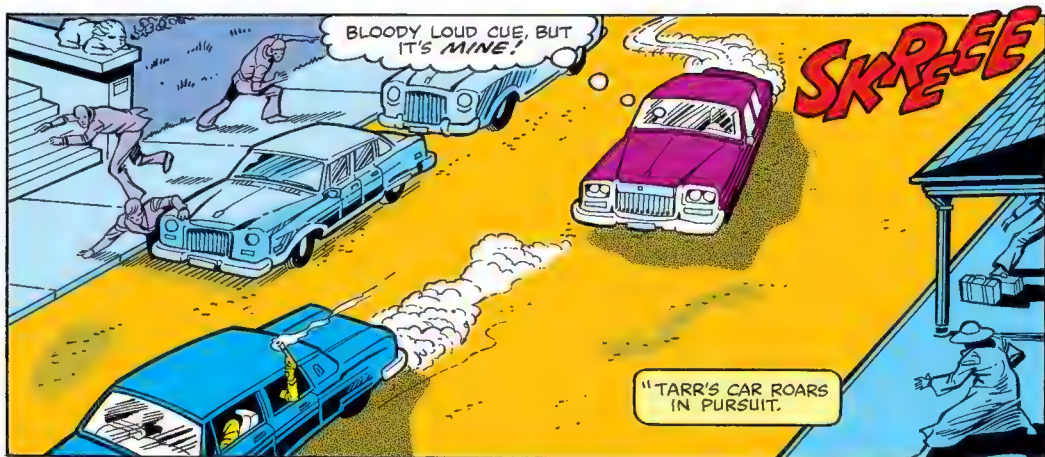
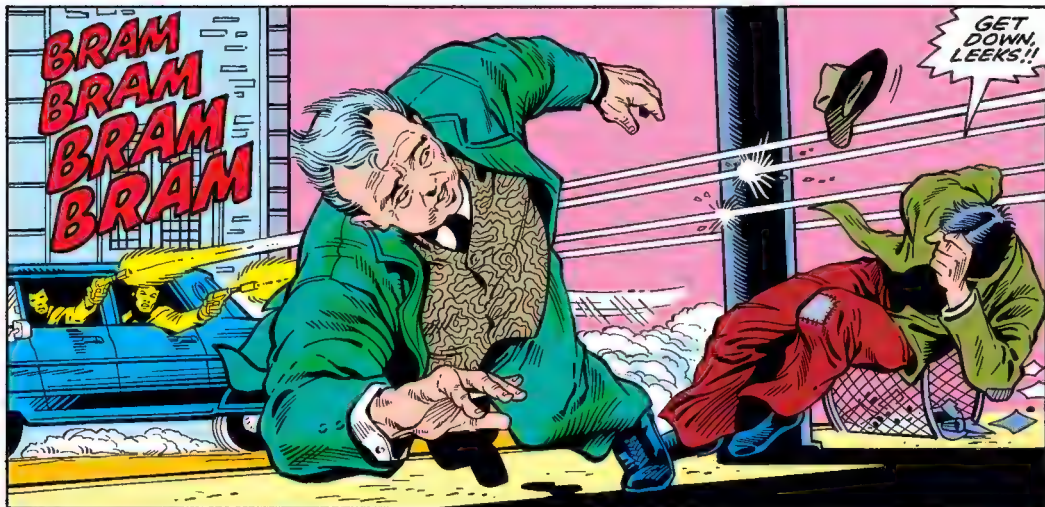
NOW, AS I SAY, WHITECHAPEL HAS ALSO BEEN INFORMED-- SO THERE'LL PROBABLY BE MI-6ERS AT THE CONTACT POINT, TOO, PERHAPS EVEN THE TWO RENEGADE CHAPS WHO WERE HERE TO REMOVE SARSFIELD'S BODY.



THEN LET OUR MISSION BE SEALED IN BLOOD.

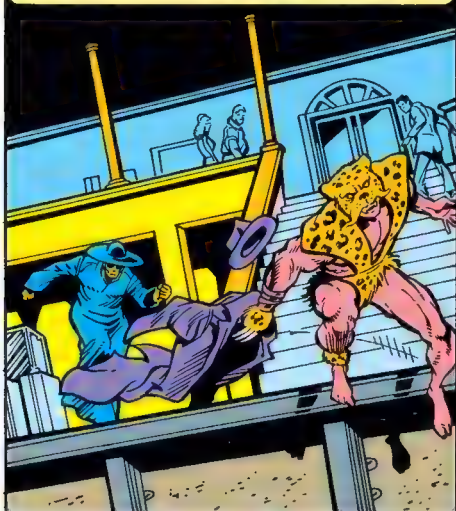




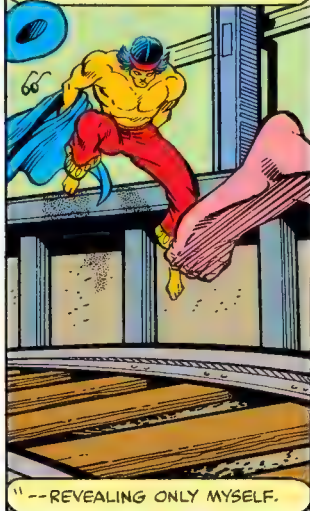




"HE ABANDONS HIS DISGUISE, REVEALING THE SKIN OF AN ANIMAL."



"I DO THE SAME WITH MY OWN DISGUISE--"



"HE MOVES SWIFTLY, UP THE TRACKS, DEEPER INTO THE DARK TUNNEL."



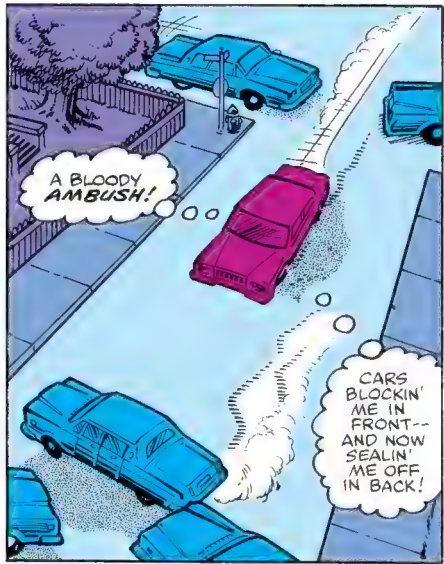
"BUT NOW HE SLOWS..."

"HE HAS NOT BEEN FLEEING."



"IN DARKNESS, THE SHADOW OF DEATH!"

"FOR ANIMALS MOVE IN PACKS, AND HE HAS LURED ME INTO--"



"A BLOODY AMBUSH!"

"CARS BLOCKIN' ME IN FRONT-- AND NOW SEALIN' ME OFF IN BACK!"

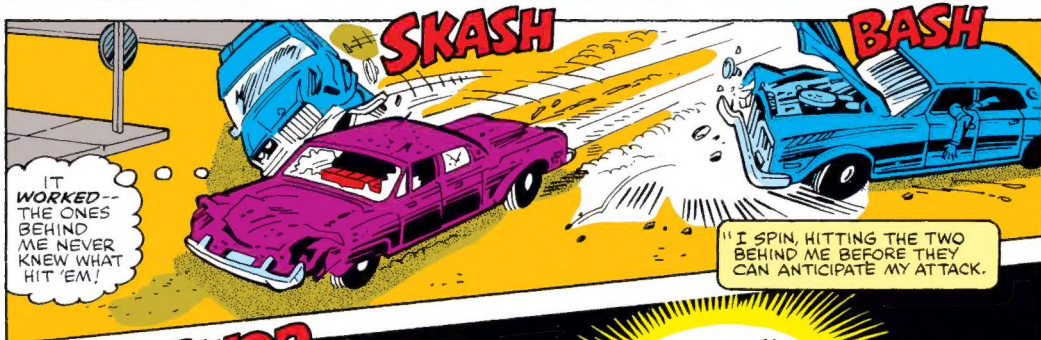
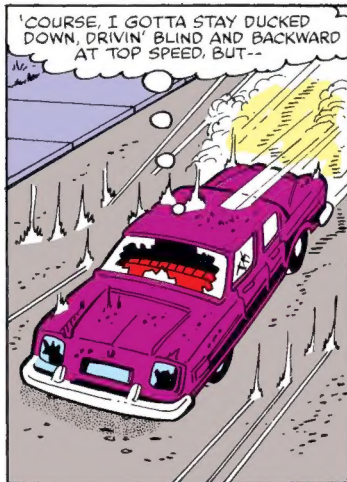


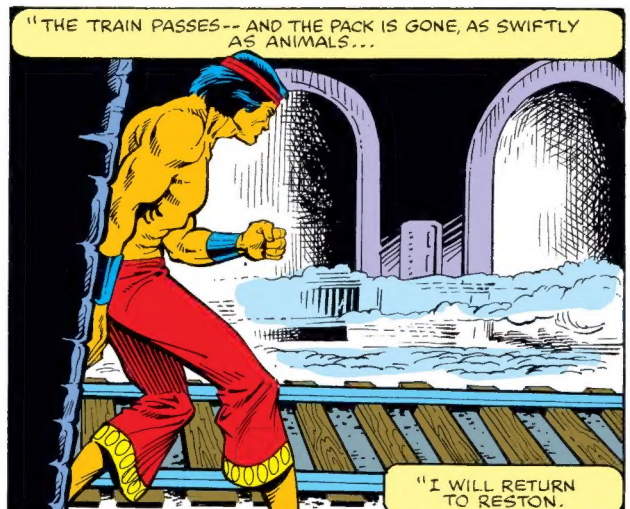
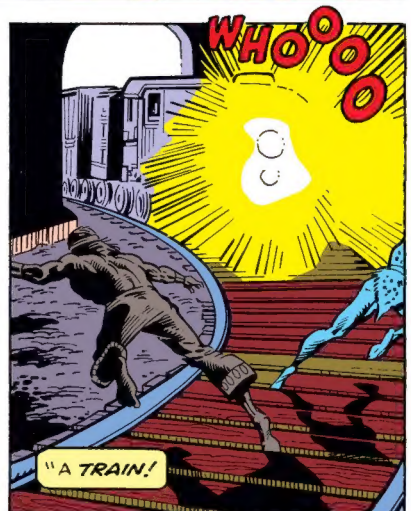
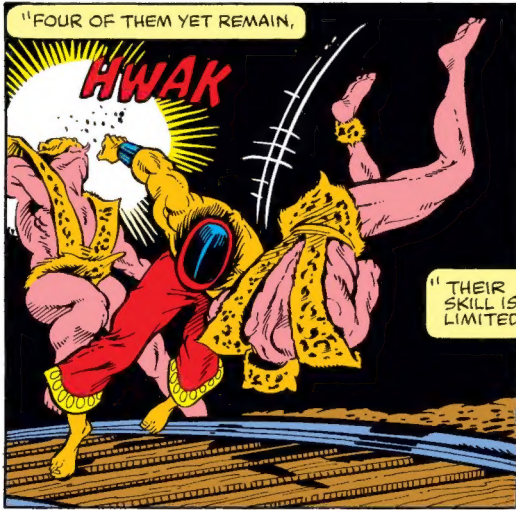
"BUT NOW WHAT? ARE THEY GONNA TRY TO TAKE ME IN AND--"

"GOOD LORD!!"



"THERE'S A BLOODY ARMY IN EVERY CAR-- AND THEY'RE GONNA WASTE ME!!"





MISSIVES TO THE MASTER!

c/o MARVEL COMICS GROUP
575 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10022

ROGER STERN
EDITOR
JIM SALICRUP
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Dear Doug,

Having read Cat Yronwode's letter in MASTER OF KUNG FU #76, I'm compelled to comment. You see, Cat mentions that if she'd been a regular reader during the aftermath of the six-part Fu Manchu/Fah Lo Suee war, she "just might have dropped out." I was a regular reader then and I *did* drop out; the continuity was all shot to hell; Jim Craig's art was an eyecore; and whenever the continuity did surface for an issue or two, there was too much Fleetwood Mac for my taste.

However, like Cat, I did go back and get all the issues I'd missed, and began buying the book regularly again with #72. It was your ad campaign that brought me back (thought you'd be gratified to know that), as well as fond memories of the time when Shang-Chi was the darling of the Marvel line. He still is, in a way. Indeed, at a time when every new series must boast of "being in the tradition of *Spider-Man*," MASTER OF KUNG FU is still brilliantly unique. The book defies categorization, and there is no precedent for the type of story it presents. And now, to make the mix perfect, I like newcomer Mike Zeck's art. "Smoke, Beads, and Blood" in #76 was a damn fine job on his part, and he's still improving with every issue.

Anyway, Cat mirrored many of my feelings about Shang-Chi — not very odd considering that, like her, I just re-read the entire series. As good as the early Englehart issues were, they lacked direction—mainly content to show Shang-Chi hanging out in Central Park eating weeds and being attacked by Si-Fan assassins every time he turned a corner. Once the Carradine Kung Fu influence took a back seat to Doug's Ian Fleming influence, the series gelled; we learned that Chi's vision was not infallible, and his philosophy was not unshakable. His distress at being labeled a "Britisher" in #39 was a high point of his growth for me; it really threw him, and he still doesn't know how to deal with it.

Speaking of #39, I disagree with Cat as far as the game of "musical beds" is concerned. Since the Shen Kuei two-parter may well have been the highpoint of Marvel's early 70's output, I really wish you'd left Cat and Juliette to the misty realm of legend; as it is, the story now seems less a testament to love than to biology, taking the romance out of it somewhat.

Getting back to another point in the book's favor, it's one of the few at Marvel which has thrived in a foreign setting. For what it's worth, I'd like to see London retained as the basis for the strip, whatever happens with MI-6.

As for #76 itself, I was delighted by it, stunned by it. The return to the back-alleys of the China district was unexpected and nostalgic; typically, the deception and frustration Shang-Chi has begun to associate with his life as an agent has now been transferred to his attempts at recapturing his heritage. I really feel for him, especially when he says, "I wish I had a father." The most devastating scene in the book, however, was Chi's final discussion with Leiko. I suppose that (being a fan of Bond and Modesty Blaise and Steed & Crew) I expected Shang-Chi's experience with "the organization" to be one big glorious adventure. That it could come to this stuns me. It is one of the deftest scenes you've ever scripted, Doug: Shang-Chi's relentless, almost hypnotic narration of all that has gone so terribly wrong — his defeated, yet powerful figure definitely cutting the tension, even as he tears his life apart — and Leiko's final breakdown. All very powerful. I'm still disturbed by it; the final panel, while beautiful, was extremely pathetic. I'm glad the tradecraft aspect of the book will be returning next issue, but I question whether it can ever be the same.

One last point, on which I also side with Cat: Fu Manchu. This is the *perfect* time to revive him.

Finally, Doug, I promise never to stop reading again (at least not while you're writing the book, which seems to be indefi-

nately), if you promise to maintain the quality of the last ten issues or so. I still shudder to think of the way the book toppled from the Gulacy pinnacle to the depths of chaos and havoc so quickly, but the past year has been quite the class act, believe me. This book *still* makes all the rest look like...well, like comicbooks.

Bob Rodi

Box 2175, Rollins College
Winter Park, FL 32789

Paradoxically, there are so many points made in Bob's letter on which we'd like to comment and/or argue, that we find ourselves unable to tackle any of them. Lack of space is the main problem; this page is primarily a forum devoted to our readers' comments, not ours. However, should anyone else out there care to pick up the gauntlet of one or two of Bob's points at a time, perhaps then we can offer our own (once-removed) comments in a future lettercol.

Doug,

"And so, a monster shall go to the Court of Kings and speak of slaying his brothers." Poetry. Sheer poetry! That must be the absolute single best line I have ever read in a comic. Poetry. That was a *great* line.

Jeremy J. Lichtenstein

3343 William Drive
Newbury Park, CA 91320

Thanks, Jer. Now...whaddaya think of this issue's closing line?

Dear Doug, Mike, and Gene,

It's nice to be proven right after so long. When Paul Gulacy left MOKF, having blazed some damned memorable trails along his passage, a great many people gave the book up for lost, relegating it to that shadowland where the dodo, the passenger pigeon and *Brother Power*, *The Geek* hang their hats. It pleases me to recall that I was *not* one of their number. "Wait," I told them, "you like the *stories* and Doug's still *writing* the book!" But nooo—without the pretty pictures, they found it too difficult to move their lips to Doug's prose, and fandom (or at least a segment of it) wrote off MOKF as a basket case. But now, I confidently predict that the Moench/Zeck team will be the one to put an end to all that nonsense; make Gene Day a third staple, and they may even forget Gulacy ever existed!

On Ms. Yronwode's suggestions (Lord, I wish I could write letters as fascinating as Cat's!—she never misses *anything* worth commenting on, whereas I just ramble aimlessly): Sorry, Bill Wu, but Marvel's Fu Manchu being a "racist" villain just doesn't wash. Granted, Fu Manchu *is* Oriental and *is* villainous, but would you feel better if Marvel had made him Anglo-Saxon, a la David Carradine? Personally, I found *that* little maneuver far more insulting (why not an Oriental actor?) than Marvel's careful handling of what Sax Rohmer left them. Ask yourself this question: Would you really place Fu Manchu in the same class as the truly stereotyped Orientals (buckteeth, round glasses, etc.) of the 40's?

I disagree with Cat, however, on the issue of Shang-Chi becoming progressively angrier. Whether he likes it or not, Shang-Chi will steadily become more and more "Americanized," as the ways of his childhood in Honan become either outdated or actively harmful in his new life. All the mental discipline in the world cannot isolate you from your environment.

And by all means, bring back Fu Manchu! No one *really* believes you killed him off, y'know...

Kent G. Orlando
4336 Prescott Rd.
Nashville, TN 37204

Doug got quite a chuckle from that last line, Kent; y'see, he read your letter no more than 2 or 3 hours after writing the following line of dialogue for Nayland Smith: "Indeed, I don't think any of us ever really believed Fu Manchu *could* die." Till nexttime, be good.